

Madame Mansfield's Granddaughter: By HARRIET A. NASH

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HE erect figure stepping daintily along the smooth highway bore little resemblance to that great army of wanderers to which it was in actual experience closely allied. The long, gray cape, though pale in color from years of exposure to wind and weather, was neat and well-kept; the wide poke bonnet, resown and pressed by the wearer's hands, was adorned with ribbons which had passed through various stages in color during the memory of man, and now emerged from the dyer's hands a vivid green, quite at variance with the foliage of the pink roses which nodded cheerily from among its carefully ironed folds. The roses had the best of it — a triumph of nature over art; for they had been cut from a bush in the old Seabro cemetery less than an hour ago, and their stems were packed in wet moss, which filled the bonnet's spacious crown. "It keeps the head cool, and works harm to no one," Serepta Hanscom graciously explained herself—the one person to whom she felt explanation of her conduct due. "It always did seem to me a little tawdry to adorn one's self with imitation when the real was close at hand." No one throughout the three counties of which she counted herself a resident would ever have thought of calling Serepta Hanscom a tramp. Let her home be wherever the night found her, and her worldly possessions were packed in the two old-fashioned valises which she carried by her side, as she roamed about the country at the happy dictates of her own fancy. Just when her origin and early history had been no one knew, and in the score of years which had passed since she first appeared among them, the coast people had quite forgotten to wonder. Her speech was that of an educated person, her manner reflected the precise elegance of the old-time seminary, but beyond certain mysterious hints of a luxurious past and high connections, Serepta Hanscom never explained herself. The coldest of the winter months were usually spent in some comfortable farmhouse, where her skilful fingers and fertile brain made her a welcome guest; but with the first coming of spring her restless feet were upon the highway once more.

It was a leisurely road which she followed this summer morning; wild roses and bay leaves mingled their fragrance by the wayside, and the breath of the sea crept through the low fit trees. There were long pauses in well-remembered nooks, for the road from Seabro to Rocky Cove was an old favorite with Miss Hanscom; and from more than one cottage upon the way there sounded a friendly greeting which detained her a brief chat. It was noontime when she reached the hilltop, where an opening in the trees gave a first glimpse of the wide bay. Serepta drew a deep breath of satisfaction. "I never shall winter so far inland again," she decided.

Halfway down the hill a white schoolhouse found place among the blackberry bushes, and upon its doorstep a youth and maiden sat. Serepta hastily changed her glasses.

"Squire Wellfleet's Ralph and Mary Cullom's Annie," she decided, thinking aloud, as was her wont. "Dear, dear, it was only yesterday I helped her mother out off her baby curls, and not longer than last week that Mary Mansfield ran away from school to marry Silas Cullom." She retraced her steps a little and ate her simple lunch beside the stone wall quite out of sight and hearing of the little schoolhouse. Then, removing her bonnet, she thoughtfully retinted it. "Roses are pretty for morning, but yarrow and violets seem more appropriate for afternoon," she said, as she lifted her valises again.

The pair upon the schoolhouse step had risen now, for children's returning voices sounded shrilly in the distance, and the young teacher's leisure hour was over. There was a flush upon her smooth cheek, and the young man's face was full of disappointment. Serepta walked more slowly. "Dear, dear, it never did run smooth," she said to herself as she came nearer, watching the pair with troubled face.

"So you mean to make me unhappy because my father

"You're going to our house, of course?" he continued.

Serepta hesitated. "Not this time," she said at last. "I was there the last time I came to Rocky Cove—we were away at college. I stayed a week, and Emily Pease and some others felt slighted. I must make it up to them this time. I only have two days to spare, for I must get back to Seabro for Captain Robert's golden wedding. They wouldn't take no for an answer." One of Serepta's greatest resources was her firm belief in the welcome which awaited her at every house.

Three hours later, her gray cape removed and her bonnet exchanged for a lace cap, Miss Mansfield moved about a spacious kitchen of Rocky Cove, brewing for herself a cup of "afternoon tea" in a china teapot, which was her inseparable companion. Her hostess declined to share the beverage, with the assurance that she never "ate between meals," but was not averse, as it proved, to a friendly gossip over the one cup.

This was Serepta's first visit to the little village for the year, and even a homeless wayfarer may be a good listener. The deaths and marriages of a twelvemonth, the winter's fishing and the new church supply had been exhausted, and Mrs. Pease leaned thoughtfully back in her chair in search of a fresh topic. "Squire Wellfleet's folks are in a great takin' about Ralph," she announced. Serepta was deeply interested, as her reply betrayed. "You don't tell me?" she remarked, dropping naturally into the vernacular of the countryside. Mrs. Pease looked gratified. All previous announcements had elicited from her guest only a calm and eminently correct "Indeed."

"They've always held their heads high and planned for Ralph to marry accordingly," continued Mrs. Pease. "But he's keeping company with Annie Cullom for all they can say or do. Mis' Wellfleet and the squire are dreadfully worked up. Of course, Annie's a good little girl, but Sil Cullom wasn't nothing but a lobsterman, though I suppose he's in heaven now, all the same. And Mary's folks turning the cold shoulder to her kind of kept them down. I always thought they might have come around after Sil got drowned, but Mary died so soon after, it hardly gives 'em time. I guess the old lady's a good deal influenced by her sons. Funny how they stay away and let that handsome place go to ruin, ain't it?"

Serepta rose to carry her cup and saucer to the sink; her interest seemed to have departed. "Seems to me your crimson rambler is blossoming early," she said, politely. "Could you spare me a cluster? I expect to stop at Mrs. Captain Collier's tonight, and she is so likely to have city company at this season. They might consider the yarrow on my bonnet an offense to good taste. I dare say you think me overparticular. Mrs. Pease, but you may have heard that I am not of your nationality. My great-grandfather was an English duke."

"So I've been told," Mrs. Pease replied, reverently. "Your father was a younger son, wasn't he?"

"The younger son of a younger son," explained the scion of nobility, proudly. "My grandfather was cast off by his family for making what they considered a misalliance—my grandmother was a relative—many times removed—of the Wandering Jew. To her blood I attribute my love for roving."

"Do tell!" exclaimed Mrs. Pease, in unfeigned admiration.

Serepta gently repacked her china and her tiny tea chest. "I am greatly indebted for the roses," she declared. "By the way, speaking of the Mansfields, have you heard that madame was coming back for a time? Well, I dare say, it is only a rumor. A bird of passage, like myself, hears all sorts of stories. Do you think the roses look best clustered or spread apart?"

The old stone house, built by the earliest of the Mansfields a full century before, had been for a quarter of that time gradually falling out of repair, and its laws were long since a tangled wilderness. The news that its owner was about to return spread swiftly throughout the little village of Rocky Cove, and careful watch was set upon the highway along which the Mansfield carriage and pair had taken their last departure, fully twenty years ago. No one thought of the water as a thoroughfare, or remembered the fabulous price which Madame Mansfield's oldest son had been reported to have paid for a steam yacht a few years since. But it came about that on a July morning, after a threatening night which left the little harbor full of vessels, smoke was seen rising from the wide chimneys of the old house, and a manservant with a rusty axe made determined attacks upon the tangle of shrubbery which obstructed the avenue to the front porch. Later in the day an elderly woman in plaid shawl and gingham sunbonnet came forth from the iron gate with a huge basket on her arm, and sought the village store.



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and mother are unjust to you, Annie," the young man said, reproachfully. "You might as well be unhappy from that cause as another," the girl replied, resolutely. "I can never marry you unless they are willing." "Ahem!" coughed Serepta. The teacher disappeared inside the building, and the young man came toward the traveler, lifting his hat. "Aunt Serepta, I declare!" he said, cordially. "I can't remember when I saw you last. Here, let me take your valises; I'm stronger than when I used to tease to see what was in them." Serepta dropped a deep curtsy. She was not accustomed to receive deference from the young men whom she encountered, and usually avoided their society lest she encounter open ridicule. "Thank you kindly, sir," she said, as she yielded the heaviest valise.

"She bought free, but not what you'd call lavish," Silas Stetson, postmaster, grocer and general dealer, announced. "Old Mis' Mansfield never was what you'd call extravagant, though in the cap'n's time they lived well. The woman says the old lady's aged some. She said she didn't know how long they was going to stay, and she said the boys wasn't comin' at present. That was about all I got. She's kind of close-mouthed, I guess. She speaks kind of like a foreigner, and her grammar's dreadful poor. I couldn't find out how they come. I asked about the horses, and she said the old lady never went out, so she hadn't no use for such. I guess she's just come back to die in the old place. Old Mis' Mansfield always did set peace and comfort a long ways ahead of style. I wonder how Squire Wellfleet's folks take her comin' back. I s'pose 'tain't liable to make much difference to Annie."

It was a week later that Rocky Cove first succeeded in opening communication with the mistress of the Mansfield estate. A few old acquaintances had called, only to be told by the elderly manservant that Madame Mansfield was unable to see them, and the village was forced to await her recovery. The manservant, having cleared the paths and made such repairs as were necessary to render the place habitable, had disappeared, and his place, dare say, was filled by an elderly colored man, whose duties seemed to be chiefly indoors, so that Rocky Cove caught only rare glimpses of him. On a sunny morning the old man came down the main street of the village, his shrunken figure clad in a broadcloth suit which the late Captain Mansfield, much against his own inclination, had been persuaded to purchase for his youngest son's wedding. Rocky Cove recognized the suit with the correct vision of a community to which dress suits are rare. "Miss Mansfield must set a lot by that nigger to rig him up in the cap'n's wedding clothes," objected Silas Stetson.

"Like as anyway, she don't know he's got 'em," suggested a customer, as he leaned from the doorway to watch the old man make a leisurely tour of the street, stopping to inquire his way of every passerby.

In less than half an hour Mrs. Squire Wellfleet might have been seen hurrying down the street to the dusty office where her husband transacted the law business of Rocky Cove. "Just read this, Henry, for mercy sakes," she urged, excitedly. The lawyer held the dainty note from him at arm's length. It was written in the delicate hand of a long past generation.

"Madame Mansfield will be at home to her friends at 3 o'clock. It will give her much pleasure to receive Mrs. Wellfleet and present her granddaughter, Miss Annie Mansfield Cullom."

Squire Wellfleet returned the note to his wife, who confronted him, helplessly. "Well, what are we going to do now?" she demanded. "I don't know very much about the ways of city society, but common sense tells me that to go smiling up there dressed in my best clothes to be introduced to that girl is just the same as saying Ralph can marry her if he wants to. And not to go—dare me, she's sent invitations to all the best houses in town, and I don't dare slight it. If the Mansfields are coming back to Rocky Cove, we must keep in with them."

Squire Wellfleet considered. "I am not aware," he said, with dignity, "that I have ever objected to my son offering attention to a granddaughter of Madame Mansfield. And I have often assured you, Marcella, that the young woman—lady is well enough in herself. It is of vast importance to me whether the mother of my future grandsons is a recognized member of the Mansfield family or must depend for family connections upon the Culloms, no one of whom, save Silas, ever owned a dory in his life." Mrs. Wellfleet gave a sigh of relief. "I'm sure I'm glad it's turning out that way," she declared. "I've begun to see 'twas little use trying to cross Ralph now, after giving him his own way for twenty-three years. How much do you suppose old Mrs. Mansfield is worth, Henry?"

"Not a penny in her own right," replied Squire Wellfleet, grimly. "The old cap'n must have foreseen something of this sort, for he left her nothing but a life interest. Everything goes to the boys. But that is neither here nor there, Marcella. The Wellfleets are far above the snobbery which demands wealth. Cap'n Mansfield's granddaughter would doubtless be regarded by her uncles as being quite as far above our son as Seth Cullom's descendant has seemed to us beneath him. I guess we'd better strike an average, Marcella, and let the boy have his way."

Later in the day the aged colored man delivered his last note at the little schoolhouse. The young teacher read it with rising color and mingled emotions. "The rightful place of Madame Mansfield's granddaughter in her mother's early home will await her on Saturday at 2 P. M." There was neither address nor signature, and Annie Cullom wistfully studied the note for any sentiment of affection or cordiality. She immediately determined not to go, and her lover, who was waiting when school was out, strongly commended her decision.

"My future wife doesn't need the belated patronage of any wealthy relatives," he declared. "No doubt they would think you far too good for me." It was at that moment that Annie's determination first wavered.

"I don't quite know what is best," she said, thoughtfully.

Promptly at the appointed hour she stood upon the crumbling ancestral porch, looking her prettiest in a fresh muslin dress with many lace-trimmed ruffles, which represented long hours of evening labor. There had been a time when she looked forward to springing upon her wedding day, but that was before rumor brought to her ears the story of the Wellfleet disapproval. Now, as she stood waiting an answer to her knock, there seemed wonderful possibilities waiting behind that closed door.

"I'm glad I came," she sighed, happily, before she had crossed the threshold.

The aged colored man admitted her to a darkened parlor, where moth-eaten tapestries testified to long neglect, and curious treasures, brought by dead and gone Mansfields from foreign lands, covered shelves and tables. There was an interval of waiting, then the manservant, in ruffled cap and huge white apron, appeared in the doorway with a lady's hat. The young lady lay "lay" Mansfield's granddaughter enter the rusty iron gates of her mother's early home. The likeness to a fairy godmother deepened, for, after that first Saturday, the mistress of the house was invisible. Always Ebenezer or Martha admitted the guest, and later served a dainty tea from a table spread with heavy damask and set with rare china. And each evening before she took her departure Martha came down with a mysterious package from her mistress; once it contained a string of pearls, again a length of rich lace—always some relic of olden time. Martha also accompanied her home on the first evening, but after that there was always Ralph, who liked to spend long twilight hours in helping her explore the old house and gardens. Sometimes a face surmounted by a lace headpiece looked down upon them from an upper window, but Madame Mansfield never appeared in person. "Mother wants you to come over to tea Wednesday," Ralph said, a little awkwardly, as they stood one evening beside a ruined fountain. "She thought we might have a little engagement party after. She and father both think we needn't wait longer than October." He paused a moment, to continue in an apologetic tone: "You mustn't think it all on account of your grandmother, Annie. You see, they didn't really know you before." And Annie generously responded: "Oh, that's all right."

The engagement party was duly celebrated, and Mrs. Wellfleet, in a satisfied manner, presented her future daughter to all of Rocky Cove and half of Seabro. Only Madame Mansfield sent a stiffly worded note of regrets. Mrs. Wellfleet drew a long breath of relief when the evening was over. "She can't very well make any objections now," she assured her husband. "I've been fearful ever since I saw her that she'd got higher plans for the girl."

"Even Madame Mansfield's granddaughter might do worse," declared Squire Wellfleet, with a satisfied glance at his stalwart son.

It was less than a week later that a long procession of hired teams from Pegasset, the nearest railway center, preceded by the Pegasset hearse, wound slowly through the streets of Rocky Cove to the village cemetery; and all the little village was electrified by the announcement which spread from house to house and sounded through the narrow streets—"It's the Mansfield family come back to bury the old lady. They say she's been paralyzed and helpless for ten months, and scarcely known the folks that took care of her."

A delegation of puzzled citizens set forth to seek an explanation from the inhabitants of the old Mansfield house, only to find it closed and tenantless once more. The rusty iron gate was locked against all intruders. But for the cleared avenue to the front porch and the scattered rose petals upon the lawn, where only last evening the lovers had fought a mimic battle with roses as weapons, the whole story of the old house's occupation might have been a dream.

"I don't know it makes any difference," Mrs. Wellfleet declared, crisply, to those of her neighbors who ventured to ask her sentiments upon the day's revelations. "Annie's clear Mansfield, as all Rocky Cove has been eager to discover in the last six weeks, and I, for one, shan't be sorry to have my son and his wife to myself without constant interference from those that think themselves better than other folks. No, I'm not a mite superstitious, and I can't say I fully agree with those who think the old lady's spirit's been back here tryin' to rectify its mistakes, while her body's been lyin' helpless and scarce breathin' down there in the city. Still, I'm not prepared to say somebody's got to be wrong in these matters, and it may be me. There's many more unjust things

she who accompanied each guest departing to the door, and received their compliments upon the beauty of the old place. Mrs. Wellfleet, suddenly apprehensive for her son's future happiness, lingered until the last. "Will you give me a rose for Ralph, my dear?" she asked, as she stood beside the vine-covered pillars of the old porch. No thought of resentment lingered in the girl's mind as she reached above her head to secure a creamy blossom more perfect than the rest. "Oh, yes, indeed," she said.

She went back to the parlor, hoping for a more perfect understanding with her hostess, whom she had not as yet ventured to address by a more familiar title than "madame." The old lady had risen, and was making a



"How'd you ever come to do such a thing, Serepta?"

slow, but dignified, exit from the room. "I think I had better be going," the girl said, doubtfully.

"Don't be in a hurry," urged madame, politely. "Annie put on her hat before the long mirror in the hall. I've had a lovely afternoon," she said, shyly.

"It has been a mutual pleasure," replied madame, without enthusiasm. "The more so that this is your proper and rightful place. You must become fully acquainted with the old place, and I should like to have you come every afternoon as soon as school is over, and remain until evening. I may not often be able to receive you in person, but Martha and Ebenezer will see that you have every attention. And"—she paused a moment to look searchingly into the girl's face—"was there a young man whom I heard mentioned? Pardon an old woman's interest in youth, my dear—I should be glad if he came, too, sometimes. It is a long time since these old gardens have been honored with lovers' confidences." There was no hint of the disapproval which had sent Mrs. Wellfleet away troubled, and Annie Cullom walked down the shadowy avenue light-hearted.

"It isn't at all like what I supposed a grandmother would be," she reflected. "It is far more like having a fairy godmother, who smooths out all the tangles in life and gives you everything you want in a wholly impersonal way."

So it came about that on each succeeding summer afternoon the interested eyes of Rocky Cove beheld Madame Mansfield's granddaughter enter the rusty iron gates of her mother's early home. The likeness to a fairy godmother deepened, for, after that first Saturday, the mistress of the house was invisible. Always Ebenezer or Martha admitted the guest, and later served a dainty tea from a table spread with heavy damask and set with rare china. And each evening before she took her departure Martha came down with a mysterious package from her mistress; once it contained a string of pearls, again a length of rich lace—always some relic of olden time. Martha also accompanied her home on the first evening, but after that there was always Ralph, who liked to spend long twilight hours in helping her explore the old house and gardens. Sometimes a face surmounted by a lace headpiece looked down upon them from an upper window, but Madame Mansfield never appeared in person. "Mother wants you to come over to tea Wednesday," Ralph said, a little awkwardly, as they stood one evening beside a ruined fountain. "She thought we might have a little engagement party after. She and father both think we needn't wait longer than October." He paused a moment, to continue in an apologetic tone: "You mustn't think it all on account of your grandmother, Annie. You see, they didn't really know you before." And Annie generously responded: "Oh, that's all right."

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happens than that a repenting soul on the borders of the other world should be given a chance to set things right again. And I'd like to have you tell me one thing; if it wasn't Madame Mansfield herself, who was it?"

Annie Cullom, with the gifts she had received at the Mansfield house, waited upon Madame Mansfield's eldest son at the little village hotel next morning. The gentleman surveyed her thoughtfully as he listened to her story; it had already reached his ears in various forms.

"Keep the trinkets, child," he said, kindly. "I don't imagine there is any one living who could tell whether they belong in the old house or not. Nearly everything of value must have been carried away from there years ago."

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